



**NATIONAL CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH (NCER)  
STANDING SUBCOMMITTEE**

**Conference Call Summary  
December 14, 2007  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon Eastern Time**

**Welcome**

*Dr. Martin Philbert, University of Michigan, NCER Standing Subcommittee Chair*

Dr. Martin Philbert, Chair of the NCER Standing Subcommittee, welcomed participants to the Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC) NCER Standing Subcommittee conference call. The purpose of this call was to discuss edits to the draft letter report of the Subcommittee's review of NCER. The letter report subsequently will be submitted to the BOSC Executive Committee for review. Dr. Philbert confirmed that the Subcommittee members had the most current draft. He then asked each participant to state his or her name and affiliation. The list of participants is attached to this summary.

Ms. Susan Peterson, Designated Federal Officer (DFO) for the Subcommittee, introduced Dr. William Sanders, the new Director of NCER. Dr. Sanders stated that he replaced Dr. Gary Foley as Director on October 1, 2007. He was pleased to learn that this Subcommittee had been organized to review the Center, and he looked forward to working with the Subcommittee members. Dr. Sanders added that he would not be present for the duration of the call. Dr. Philbert asked if the Subcommittee members had any questions for Dr. Sanders; there were no questions.

**Administrative Procedures**

*Ms. Susan Peterson, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)/Office of Science Policy (OSP), Subcommittee DFO*

Ms. Peterson thanked the Subcommittee members for their participation on the call. She explained that the BOSC Subcommittee is a federal advisory committee that has been asked to respond to a set of charge questions as part of a review of EPA's NCER. As DFO, Ms. Peterson serves as the liaison between the Subcommittee members and the Agency and is responsible for ensuring that the Subcommittee members comply with the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). Ms. Peterson briefly explained these FACA requirements. All meetings involving substantive issues—whether in person, by phone, or by e-mail—are open to the public. This includes all group communications that include at least one-half of the Subcommittee members. All meetings must be announced in the *Federal Register* at least 15 calendar days in advance of the meeting (the Docket Identification Number for this meeting was EPA-HQ-ORD-2007-0484). In addition, all advisory committee documents are made available to the public. There is time set aside for public comment during each meeting or call. No advance requests for comment had been submitted by the public, but Ms. Peterson will call for public comments at 10:20 a.m.

This is the fifth public meeting of this Subcommittee. Ms. Peterson confirmed that all Subcommittee members had received the agenda for the call and requested that Subcommittee members submit their

homework sheets detailing time spent preparing the draft letter report since the conference call on November 1, 2007.

Ms. Peterson asked all participants to identify themselves when speaking and to speak clearly so that the contractor taking notes could capture the discussions accurately. She asked that participants mute their phone lines when they are not speaking to minimize background noise during the call.

Ms. Peterson stated that she was aware that payments for some of the Subcommittee members had been delayed. She is working with the appropriate persons to resolve this issue by next week, before the end of the year.

## **Subcommittee Discussion**

*Dr. Martin Philbert, University of Michigan, Subcommittee Chair*

Dr. Philbert explained that the Subcommittee members would discuss each section of the draft letter report. They would begin with the charge questions and discuss the introduction last. He asked Dr. Adam Finkel to lead the discussion of Charge Question 1 and noted that Dr. Alan Hansen had inserted comments in this section.

Dr. Finkel asked Ms. Peterson if he could submit minor grammatical changes to her or to Dr. Philbert. Ms. Peterson said that would be appropriate as long as the changes are neither technical nor substantive.

Dr. Finkel stated that his changes to the letter report under Charge Question 2 involved the issue of social science research. He remarked that Dr. Hansen had brought an important issue to his attention: in the economics area, the budget had been reduced almost to zero. In the letter report, he recommended advancing the methods for evaluating the costs and benefits of regulatory and other interventions. Dr. Finkel noted that the analyses would be the responsibility of the program offices.

Dr. Finkel stated that he had not received any other comments from Subcommittee members with regard to this section. Dr. Hansen asked if the Subcommittee members understood clearly what would be added to the letter report. Dr. Philbert commented that Dr. Finkel had submitted two pages of comments on December 13, 2007, for the Subcommittee's review. Dr. Seth Tuler said that he had not viewed the comments and asked if Dr. Finkel would discuss them in more detail. Dr. Finkel replied that he had submitted comments via Ms. Peterson. In this file, Dr. Finkel had composed two paragraphs describing his reaction to the materials that the Subcommittee members had received from NCER. These materials were meant to represent NCER's efforts to communicate to decision-makers the significance and impact of its work. Dr. Finkel proposed that his comments regarding materials be added to the recommendations corresponding to Charge Question 2. In addition, Dr. Finkel listed corrections to two minor typographical errors, and he responded to Dr. Hansen's comment pertaining to social science research (page 2, Recommendation 5, lines 15-16). Dr. Hansen had stated that Dr. Finkel's recommendation to "balance its extramural research portfolio with social science, cognitive science, and engineering research," seemed as though Dr. Finkel was suggesting equal efforts in these areas, with which Dr. Hansen did not agree. Dr. Finkel clarified that by "balance," he meant that NCER should incorporate these disciplines in some way. Finally, Dr. Finkel had provided extra clarifying verbiage that he thought should be added to the document. Specifically, he remarked in his comments that NCER appeared to focus very little "on economic and cognitive work on huge issues like the cost of regulatory and other interventions, the economic evaluation of health and environmental effects, and the efficiencies of regulatory and other strategies." Rather than using the term balance, the Subcommittee members could suggest more effort toward these topics.

Dr. David Baker stated that sometimes it is valuable to conduct noneconomic evaluations. He asked if Dr. Finkel would include that in his list of topics. Dr. Finkel replied that most people regard economic evaluation as including studies that are listed in nonmarket ways. Dr. Hansen emphasized that the

Subcommittee's report should not imply that NCER conduct regulatory impact assessment work, but rather that it should examine its methodology and develop new tools. Dr. Baker agreed.

Dr. Philbert asked Dr. Finkel to reiterate the changes he intends to make. Dr. Finkel responded that the recommendation that pertains to balancing NCER's extramural portfolio will be changed so that the recommendation does not imply an equal balance. He suggested changing the word "balance" to "add back into." In addition, he said that he will add to that recommendation verbiage that lists examples of the work that they recommend. This language might include, "methods development of the following areas," followed by the clause that Dr. Finkel had included in the comments he submitted to the Subcommittee members.

Dr. Hansen agreed with Dr. Finkel's proposed changes. Dr. Philbert asked if the Subcommittee members had any additional suggestions. They did not.

## **Public Comment**

At 10:20 a.m., Ms. Peterson called for public comment. No members of the public offered comments.

## **Subcommittee Discussion (continued)**

*Dr. Martin Philbert, University of Michigan, Subcommittee Chair*

Dr. Philbert directed the Subcommittee members to Charge Question 2. He stated that Dr. Hansen led the preparation of this section of the report. Dr. Hansen commented that the members of his workgroup had inserted the following edits (page 9, lines 20-36):

"...There also is evidence that some of its products have impacted policy. Without additional systematic evaluation of the products and their impacts on their target audiences, we cannot judge how widespread this effectiveness is.

Because none of the supplied examples of communications products dealt with drinking water, yet that is within the purview of NCER, one of the Subcommittee members (DAC) [note: '(DAC)' will be removed] accessed the NCER publication database at <http://es.epa.gov/ncer/publications> and conducted a search using the term 'drinking water.' Abstracts of 507 projects including titles, investigators, institutions, grant amounts, reports, 'publications' and 'journal articles' resulted from the search. These 507 abstracts appeared to cover the general subject area of 'water' and resulted in 247 final reports, 3,419 publications (posters, proceedings, presentations, and non-journal articles), and 908 journal articles. Although imperfect, the publications database represents a decent and reasonably complete effort at summarizing communication to the scientific community and in some sense to the technical public and rulemakers. Because some instances of 'journal articles' were found not to be refereed, what constitutes a journal article should probably be clarified. As an external exercise, NCER staff also might examine the circumstances surrounding the extremes of productivity, which include zero publications for million-dollar-plus grants and 40 journal articles from a \$200,000 grant."

Dr. Hansen added that the parenthetical "(DAC)" should be removed from the paragraph because the Subcommittee members had agreed not to identify themselves in the letter report.

Dr. Philbert thanked Dr. Hansen and asked the Subcommittee members if they had comments. Dr. Finkel commended the addition but stated that he thought the two paragraphs he had submitted would be included under Charge Question 2. These comments pertained to Dr. Finkel's evaluation of how well NCER's one-page summary documents address policy issues. Dr. Hansen agreed that the comments should be inserted. He had assumed Dr. Philbert would determine who should insert the comments. Dr. Philbert explained that he had asked Dr. Hansen via e-mail to insert the comments. Dr. Hansen said he had not seen that e-mail. Dr. Philbert agreed to insert the comments. He asked Ms. Peterson if it would be

necessary to schedule another public call after those changes have been made. Ms. Peterson said that it would not be necessary because the changes are being discussed during this call.

Dr. Philbert asked Dr. Finkel to mention specifically the additions he would want in this section. Dr. Finkel reiterated that his comments included a paragraph explaining that his comments were in response to the Subcommittee conference call on November 1, 2007. This was followed by two paragraphs that were to be inserted into the letter report. Dr. Finkel explained that he had reviewed some of NCER's representative one-page communications documents—specifically, the Science To Achieve Results (STAR) summary entitled, “Development of a PBPK/PD Model To Quantitate Biomarkers of Exposure for Organophosphate Insecticides,” and the six-page brochure entitled, “The MESA Air Pollution Study: Strengthening the Scientific Foundation for Air Quality Management.” He had commented in the paragraphs that he thought the summaries were well-written, general interest technical summaries, and he suggested a few additional ways for NCER to describe the usefulness of its work to decision-makers and the benefits of its work to the public. Dr. Philbert confirmed that the Subcommittee members had received Dr. Finkel's edits.

Dr. Hansen stated that Dr. Finkel's paragraphs might be inserted on page 10 between lines 17 and 18. The paragraphs would follow the section that begins with, “Full implementation of the portfolio...” Drs. Finkel and Philbert agreed with this suggestion.

Dr. Finkel remarked that the Subcommittee members had discussed whether a subset of NCER's communications materials would be representative of the Center's efforts. He reiterated that NCER had provided materials, and he had chosen two of them on which to comment. If none of the other Subcommittee members had reviewed the other materials, then they should clarify that in their report. Dr. Hansen stated that he looked at all of the provided materials, and he tried to address the entire subset in the letter report. He had made generic comments; he thought that Dr. Finkel's comments were specific to two of the materials. Dr. Finkel agreed and said he had chosen to comment on two of the materials that had interested him.

Dr. Philbert confirmed that there were no other questions or comments from the Subcommittee. Dr. Tuler stated that he agreed with the changes under Charge Question 2 of the letter report.

Dr. Philbert stated that Mr. David Rejeski led the workgroup responsible for Charge Question 3. Mr. Rejeski acknowledged that there were many typographical errors in this section of the report; he agreed to edit the report to correct these errors. He noted that he had not received any comments from the Subcommittee members regarding substantive issues, so he asked if there were any comments from the Subcommittee. Dr. Hansen asked Ms. Peterson if EPA would edit the letter report for grammar before it is submitted to the BOSC Executive Committee. Ms. Peterson replied that a contractor will edit the letter report to correct format, spelling, grammatical, and similar errors. She noted, however, that it is the Subcommittee members' responsibility to ensure that the report is accurate and clearly states what they intend.

Dr. Baker remarked that it would be helpful to include the date on letter report drafts so they could be differentiated easily. He added that edits to the section pertaining to Charge Question 3 are important because currently there are many errors, and they make it difficult to review the content. Mr. Rejeski agreed. Dr. Philbert commented that he is responsible for some of the errors, as he prepared parts of the report while he was feeling ill. He confirmed that Mr. Rejeski will review and edit the entire section and then transmit the revised section to Dr. Philbert for insertion into the report. Mr. Rejeski also will provide full names for the acronyms used in this section.

Dr. Philbert asked if the Subcommittee members had comments regarding the introduction of the letter report. Dr. Hansen stated that he had inserted edits (using the “Track Changes” function in the Microsoft Word document) where words seemed to be missing from the report. Specifically, the sentence (page 2,

lines 2-5), “Emphasis is placed on qualitative and quantitative metrics that enable the Center and Agency to identify and set priorities that stimulate innovation and discovery, assess achievement and impact in traditional...” was missing a phrase. Dr. Philbert confirmed that the missing words were “areas of research.”

Dr. Baker directed the Subcommittee members to Recommendation 2 (page 2, lines 9-10). It states that “NCER should initiate a dialogue with EPA program offices about what information is most needed for its mission.” Dr. Baker expected that NCER instead would be interested in the information that is most needed for the missions of the program offices so that NCER could be responsive to the needs of the program offices. Therefore, “its mission” in Recommendation 2 should be changed to “their missions.” The Subcommittee members agreed.

Mr. Rejeski stated that a long list of recommendations is included in the report. He noted that the list currently is numbered, but suggested the numbers be removed because the Subcommittee does not mean to imply a ranked list of priorities. He asked if the Subcommittee members would consider partitioning the list into three clusters. The first five recommendations could comprise a cluster about priority setting, recommendations 6-9 could provide advice about exploring the frontier or identifying emerging issues, and the final seven recommendations could comprise a cluster about measuring impact. Dr. Finkel agreed with this approach but suggested a change to Recommendation 7: “NCER should consider use of an unsolicited grant submission process to encourage the generation of relevant scientific questions that do not fall under the rubric of existing [RFAs].” He had thought this recommendation pertained both to emerging issues and to traditional programs that were not producing the best research because the RFAs were being crafted without dialogue. Dr. Finkel suggested moving this recommendation to the priority setting cluster. The Subcommittee members agreed.

Dr. Hansen stated that a word was missing from Recommendation 7. Dr. Finkel replied that the term “RFAs” should be inserted at the end of the recommendation. He added that the recommendation should be changed so that “do not fall under the rubric of” reads “do not exactly match existing RFAs.” He clarified that the recommendation does not suggest that NCER’s grant topics are poorly chosen but rather that EPA writes detailed specifications from the topics it selects. If an investigator has a different idea about the topic, they may read the RFA and assume that they cannot apply to the program.

Dr. Philbert confirmed that this recommendation should be moved to the priority setting cluster. He stated that his interpretation of the recommendation is that it allows for a “bottom up” identification of frontiers that are not matched by RFAs. Dr. Finkel agreed.

Dr. Hansen suggested deleting “current” and inserting “previous” into Recommendation 9: “NCER should revitalize the Exploratory Grant mechanism and expand it considerably from its current sole focus on nanotechnology.” He had thought that an Exploratory Research Program devoted to nanotechnology was no longer in place. He asked Ms. Peterson to confirm that. She directed the question to Ms. Barbara Klieforth who remarked that there is a nanotechnology program at EPA. Dr. Hansen replied that his proposed change should be disregarded.

Dr. Hansen directed the Subcommittee members to Recommendations 10 and 11 (page 2, lines 27-30), which pertain to bibliometrics and data mining. He did not understand why the Subcommittee advised NCER to conduct these analyses, because NCER already does. Mr. Rejeski explained that in the section under Charge Question 3 where this recommendation is expanded, the Subcommittee acknowledges NCER’s efforts in these areas. He stated that the Subcommittee simply is recommending that NCER pursue these analyses further. Dr. Hansen suggested that the term “consider the use” be changed to “expand the use” in each of those recommendations. The Subcommittee members agreed.



Dr. Philbert confirmed that there were no other proposed changes to the draft letter report. He requested a motion to accept the report pending the proposed corrections. Dr. Finkel made the motion, and Mr. Rejeski seconded it.

Dr. Hansen clarified that Dr. Philbert will insert under Charge Question 2 the two paragraphs that Dr. Finkel prepared. Dr. Philbert summarized the remaining tasks: (1) he will edit the introduction; (2) he will insert Dr. Finkel's statements under Charge Question 2 on page 10 between lines 17 and 18; and (3) Mr. Rejeski will edit the section corresponding to Charge Question 3.

Dr. Finkel confirmed that the Subcommittee members will receive the revised letter report after the changes are made but before the report is submitted to the BOSC Executive Committee. He asked if they could reply to changes without first transmitting them to Ms. Peterson. Dr. Philbert and Ms. Peterson responded that all communications should first be sent to her so she can ensure they are transmitted to all members of the Subcommittee.

Dr. Philbert confirmed that the Subcommittee members unanimously approved of the draft letter report pending corrections. He thanked the Subcommittee members for their work.

Dr. Philbert reiterated that he and Mr. Rejeski will complete edits to the report by close of business (COB) Monday, December 17, 2007. Ms. Peterson will transmit the report to the Subcommittee members on Tuesday, December 18, 2007. The Subcommittee members will respond with their comments by COB the following day, and if there are no additional changes requested, the report will be submitted to the BOSC Executive Committee for review in January. All participants agreed with this timeline. Dr. Philbert thanked the Subcommittee members and adjourned the call at 10:50 a.m.

### **Action Items**

- ✧ The Subcommittee members will submit to Ms. Peterson their homework sheets detailing time spent preparing the draft letter report since the conference call on November 1, 2007.
- ✧ Subcommittee members who notice errors that are not technical or substantive should submit corrections to Ms. Peterson.
- ✧ Mr. Rejeski will edit the section under Charge Question 3 for typographical errors and will provide full names for the acronyms used in this section. These edits will be transmitted to Dr. Philbert for insertion into the report.
- ✧ Dr. Philbert will:
  - Insert under Charge Question 2 the two paragraphs composed by Dr. Finkel regarding how well NCER's communications documents address policy issues and public health benefits. These paragraphs will be inserted on page 10 between lines 17 and 18.
  - Change the term "balance" (page 2, Recommendation 5, lines 15-16) so that the recommendation does not imply an equal balance. The term may be changed to "add back into." In addition, this recommendation will be supported with Dr. Finkel's comments that NCER appeared to focus very little "on economic and cognitive work on huge issues like the cost of regulatory and other interventions, the economic evaluation of health and environmental effects, and the efficiencies of regulatory and other strategies."

- Remove the term “(DAC)” under Charge Question 2 (page 9, lines 20-36).
  - Add “areas of research” to the end of the sentence (page 2, lines 2-5), “Emphasis is placed on qualitative and quantitative metrics that enable the Center and Agency to identify and set priorities that stimulate innovation and discovery, assess achievement and impact in traditional...”.
  - Change “its mission” to “their missions” under Recommendation 2 (page 2, lines 9-10).
  - Remove the numbers from the recommendations list, and create clusters of recommendations instead. The first five recommendations and Recommendation 7 could comprise a cluster about priority setting; Recommendations 6, 8, and 9 create a cluster that provide advice about exploring the frontier or identifying emerging issues, and the last seven recommendations comprise a cluster about measuring impact.
  - Insert the term “RFAs” at the end of Recommendation 7, and change the phrase “do not fall under the rubric of” to read “do not exactly match existing”.
  - Change “consider the use” to “expand the use” in Recommendations 10 and 11 (page 2, lines 27-30).
- ✧ Dr. Philbert and Mr. Rejeski will complete edits to the report by COB Monday, December 17, 2007.
- ✧ Ms. Peterson will transmit the edited report to the Subcommittee members on Tuesday, December 18, 2007.
- ✧ The Subcommittee members will respond with comments to Ms. Peterson by COB the following day.

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## **NCER STANDING SUBCOMMITTEE**

### **AGENDA**

**December 14, 2007**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon Eastern Time**

10:00–10:15 a.m.	Welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Roll Call</li><li>- Purpose of Teleconference Call</li><li>- Introduction of New NCER Director</li></ul>	Dr. Martin Philbert, Subcommittee Chair
10:15–10:20 a.m.	Administrative Procedures	Ms. Susan Peterson BOSC Executive Committee DFO
10:20–10:30 a.m.	Public Comment	
10:30–12:00 noon	Subcommittee Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Summary of Draft Report Progress</li><li>- Draft Report Discussion</li><li>- Draft Report Next Steps and Schedule</li></ul>	Dr. Martin Philbert Subcommittee Chair and
12:00 noon	Adjourn	